



Opinion Science Podcast

Hosted by Andy Luttrell

Influence with Robert Cialdini

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Andy Luttrell:

I'm pretty sure I was in high school when I first discovered this book, *Influence—The Psychology of Persuasion*. I got it at the library. It promised to reveal powerful psychological strategies to influence other people. As a young kid looking for control in the world, it was an alluring prospect. But as I read it, I saw that these weren't like secret mystical spells or anything...they were the results of basic scientific experiments on how people think and relate to others.

I rediscovered the book again in college as my interest in psychology solidified, and then again in grad school when I was actually studying the psychology of persuasion myself. And now...I get to talk to the guy who wrote the book.

You're listening to Opinion Science. The show about our opinions, where they come from, and how they change. I'm Andy Luttrell. A big topic in the science of our opinions is persuasion, and it's hard to talk about the psychology of persuasion without bringing up Robert Cialdini. He's an emeritus professor of psychology and marketing at Arizona State University, where he's been since 1971. He's led an influential program of research on attitudes, compliance, altruism, social norms—you name it.

But he's probably most known for his book *Influence* and his six principles of influence. The book first came out in 1984 and has since sold over 5-million copies worldwide in 44 different languages. And as if that weren't enough, last week he released a brand new updated and expanded edition of the book, which features a seventh principle of influence—unity—which is that shared identities increase persuasion. I've read previous editions of the book several times before, but I tell ya—I was just as entranced reading this new one.

So I'm excited to share my conversation with Dr. Cialdini where we talk about the new book, how he started studying influence, what made him write a book for the public at a time when academics stayed within their university walls, and how we can be effective communicators of social science findings.

Before we jump into our conversation, though, I need to set the stage a little bit. When we met, I asked a question that was mostly for my own curiosity—I didn't think it was relevant to the topics we would be covering. But eventually I realized it was actually the perfect place to start our

conversation...I just didn't cue things up very well and you might not know what the heck we're talking about.

So a little bit of context...I asked Dr. Cialdini about his research on what he calls basking in reflected glory. The idea is basically that people will associate themselves with a group more strongly when that group is successful. It's like we experience our group's successes as though they're our own.

The classic finding is from an article he published in 1976. They closely monitored the clothes college students wore at seven universities across the country—Arizona State, Notre Dame, Michigan, etc.—but they were specifically looking at whether students were wearing university apparel—jackets and t-shirts with their school's name on it—and they only really cared what students were wearing on Mondays.

Why Mondays? Well, on the weekends, there are football games. And they wanted to see what happens when a school's team had just won the game that weekend and what happens when the team lost the game. He and his team found that across these schools, more students wore university apparel the Monday after a win than the Monday after a loss. They were celebrating a team's success by associating more proudly with the group.

Anyhow, basking in reflected glory has gone on to generate all sorts of cool research—you can check out a YouTube video I made this year for more on that. But if you've listened to this podcast before, you might know that I went to grad school at Ohio State – talk about an ingroup people won't shut about – and I had heard this rumor that Cialdini was inspired to test basking in reflected glory because of an observation he had while he was a visiting professor at Ohio State in the early 70s. It made sense to me—the whole city is awash in scarlet OSU gear on game days—but I wanted to know if that rumor was true, so I asked him. And that's how we got into things...

Andy Luttrell:

I had one other question for you, actually, just before... This is just a curiosity, mostly for my sake. The basking in reflected glory work that you've done, I had heard a rumor that it started with an observation when you were a visiting professor at Ohio State.

Robert Cialdini:

Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

Is that right? Was Ohio State's campus the genesis of that work?

Robert Cialdini:

Yes. It was. You know, the social psychology program was in the stadium, and I had tickets to leave, to be in my seat, but I would go into the office in the morning and work, and then go into the stadium, the bowl of the stadium, and I saw this immense proliferation of joy, and cheers, and ecstasy associated with the team just running on the field. Just running on the field. They didn't do anything. They just appeared and people went berserk. And I thought to myself, "Cialdini, you're studying the wrong thing. Look at the power here." Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah. Those days sound so cool when the department was in the stadium. I mean, those days were long gone by the time I got there, but hearing stories about how the seed of implicit social cognition started in the basement of the football stadium and all of these other amazing things that have come out of that program, all toiled away underneath the football stadium.

Robert Cialdini:

It was a great place, actually. We were isolated. There weren't any other academic units there, so we sort of had the run of that section of the stadium, and yeah, it was possible to go through some dark corridors, through some little-used doors, and into the stadium. And that was the thing that struck me. I had been in the office working on a dataset that wasn't quite significant, and I'm trying to think, "Well, how... Do I strengthen the manipulation? Do I add more subjects?" All those little tricks that you do. And then I came out, and then there's this volcano of enthusiasm, and energy, and approbation associated with the team, and I thought, "Oh, my God. What am I doing down there trying to get a standard deviation from three quarters of a point to one point when the power is around me here?" Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

So, you know, that actually maybe is a better place to start than I anticipated, because that almost has sort of sparked a shift in sort of for a long time the work that you did, right? In terms of looking to the world to find the powerful stuff that's going on around you, rather than going, "Can I move one inch beyond this paper that came out one year ago?" And so, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, I had this planned for a little bit later, but your full cycle approach to social psychology? Which I think is an approach that is great and has just, for reasons maybe you can elucidate, hasn't quite caught on in the way that one would hope that it has.

So, could you explain what that is, where that idea came from, and why you think it's important?

Robert Cialdini:

Well, the idea, it comes from the fact that as researchers, we were taught to treat the data that came out of laboratory investigations as the gold standard, when in fact it seemed to me that there are examples and lessons to be learned from the exchanges that people engage in every day outside of the laboratory in much more naturally occurring circumstances that serve as checks and moderators on how much we should believe what we found in the laboratory, which is actually a hot house, isn't it? We eliminate all other variables, all other influences on the growth of our idea and the thriving, flourishing of it, that might be extant in naturally occurring situations that may make that effect that we found there essentially negligible. Because these other things are just overpowering it. We just seal them off and away from the investigation that we do in the lab.

So, we not only should begin our investigations with observations of how the world works outside of the laboratory in our own exchanges with people, but we should also then look back to the real world to see if the findings we've obtained in the laboratory align with what we see outside. If they don't, we shouldn't be so sure to think that our observations have been somehow flawed. We might think that our dataset obtained in those restricted conditions may not be representative of what actually occurs in the naturally occurring environment.

Andy Luttrell:

It resonates especially in this time of concern about replicability and all these sorts of things, and some of that I feel comes down to these hot house laboratories, mine being a little bit different from yours, that if we pay so much attention to exactly what's going on when we strip all the pieces away in the particular way, I've implemented that experience in my lab, I may not expect it to replicate in yours. In some ways, there are concerns about replicability of field experiments too, because my community is different from yours, and what's happening in my community may differ from yours, but I do think that the full cycle approach, it just hits the question from so many angles that hopefully it protects against those kinds of concerns.

Robert Cialdini:

Right. So, for example, we did multiple experiments on the topic of basking in reflected glory that we saw in the football stadium of the Ohio State University team outside of the laboratory, and as a result, were able to think about the result as something that was more likely to survive replication attempts than what... Because those studies were done where all of these other variables were acting, and we still got the effect. And so, recently there has been a replication of the basking in reflected glory study by some people in sports psychology at Ohio State University, and they replicated our effects again, almost 50 years later.

Andy Luttrell:

It's funny. There's a new movement of multisite studies, where it's like, "We'll run this in multiple sites around the world and make sure that it is reliable." And I'm remembering that paper. Like you say, we went to nine different universities or something like that, and we saw maybe a little bit stronger here than there, but overall, this is a replicable phenomenon.

Robert Cialdini:

Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

And what I like about it too is that you're obviously a champion of field experiments as so important, and the reservation I always have as sort of a process-minded scientist is like, "But how do we drill into exactly why these things are happening or what's going on in the heads of people as they're making these decisions?" And looking at the moderators and all of this. But you anticipated that with the full cycle approach because you say, "No, just one field study," as far as I'm understanding it, that's not the end of the project. You have to go back to the lab to unpack that process and then go back to the field to make sure it all still makes sense.

Robert Cialdini:

That's right. The lab is a place for understanding the moderators and mediators of your effect that you can put in or out of the scene in a rigorous way, and that helps you understand. You also have the secondary data sources, the secondary pieces of information. Surveys, interviews, reaction times, all these things that are very difficult to get from people who are at a football game, or even in a parking lot as they leave the football game. Whatever the setting is, it's very difficult to get those kinds of datasets that allow you to nail down moderators, and mediators, and answer the question why, psychologically, did this happen with any one study.

With field studies, you have to do multiple studies that zero in, essentially, on the probable cause by changing things, one thing for each study, and so you can rule out alternative explanations that way or support a particular explanation. But it takes a lot of those studies and that takes a long time to generate.

Andy Luttrell:

I've heard you say in another interview something like the amount of time it takes someone to run, collect, analyze, and write up their study, you would still be waiting to hear back from the ethics board on whether you could actually pull off a field experiment.

Robert Cialdini:

Or the people who are in charge of the setting. They have to get clearance for us to use... Let's say for example I ran a littering study. I did. I ran a littering study at Ohio State outside the hospital, the medical school, and we had to wait to get clearance to use the parking structure from the people who were in charge of it, and that took a while. That had to go up the ladder and somebody had to decide yes or no, and sometimes the answer was no, which made us have to change what we were proposing and run it back up the ladder and so on. So, it would take a long time.

This is why I think one of the things I say tongue in cheek about field researchers, to field researchers, is if you do a big, large-scale field study of the sorts that we've tried to undertake, it's unlikely that your work will fail to be replicated in the literature. For one reason, because you've done it in a place where it seems like it's a stronger effect in order for it to emerge in that mix of other variables. But secondly, it's unlikely that people will undertake to try to replicate that study because it's such a big undertaking.

Andy Luttrell:

I feel the same. I do some work in longitudinal attitude stability over time, and I go, "Oh, if I'm willing to do it, this is a hole in the literature." Not because no one's thought of the question, because no one wants to deal with longitudinal data and collecting data over time.

Robert Cialdini:

You know, I think you've hit on our regrettable little secret in academic social psychology, and that is convenience has dominated our decision choices about what factors and phenomena to study and how.

Andy Luttrell:

So, that's a nice segue into the work that you've done in compliance and influence, and the book, both the original and the editions since then, and just to sort of set the groundwork for folks who maybe are new to this discipline or way of thinking about things, the book is called Influence, and I always go back to this in Elliot Aronson's Social Animal, this book about social psychology, he defines social psychology as basically social influence. He says that's what social psychology is. And so, I'm wondering how do you, given all the work you've done in this space, what are the bounds of influence for you? What do you mean when you talk about influence and is that any different from persuasion? Or am I just playing a semantics game?

Robert Cialdini:

Well, in the literature of academic social psychology, we do make that distinction. Persuasion is usually about changing attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, even definitions of the situation we're in, whereas social influence is about changing behavior.

Andy Luttrell:

So, is it... Would you say that the book is primarily about changing behavior? Or would the same ideas equally apply to changing minds?

Robert Cialdini:

So, the same, I wouldn't be surprised if the same factors apply to changing minds and opinions and so on as apply to changing behavior. And sometimes we change behavior because we've changed an attitude or a definition of the situation. But it seems to me, and I'm biased in this regard, we change attitudes, and beliefs, and perceptions in the service of changing behavior. So, why not just go right to the behavior? It's not to say that that's uninteresting. It's fascinating how those separate dimensions line up. But it's often the case, for example, that I don't have to change your attitude about a movie that I say, "Let's go see this movie." For you to say, "Yes, okay. Let's go see it." If I say, "You know, you chose the movie last week." It doesn't matter what your attitude is now. There's an obligation. There's an exchange. There's a reciprocal relationship that we have that makes your choice, your behavioral choice, sort of detached from your attitudes about the film.

Andy Luttrell:

And the sly thing about all of this is that we also know that attitude change can follow behavior change, right? Once you go, "Oh, gosh. I guess if I said it was okay to go to this movie, I must have really thought that that was a good idea."

Robert Cialdini:

Right.

Andy Luttrell:

Maybe indirectly these things are also...

Robert Cialdini:

That's right. And I certainly don't want to say that we never change our behaviors based on our attitudes. Often, we do. But it's just not a perfect correlation at all.

Andy Luttrell:

So, I was looking at your CV and one question is I got the impression based on the dates that you finished your PhD in three years. Is that true?

Robert Cialdini:

It is.

Andy Luttrell:

Oh, wow.

Robert Cialdini:

And I went and I did a postdoc with Stanley Schacter, who at the time was maybe the leading social psychologist of the era, and that was great because I saw a different way of approaching research than I had been exposed to in my graduate training at UNC Chapel Hill, where my major professor was Chet Insko and another major influence was John Thibaut, and they approached research very differently than Schacter did, and I thought at the end of those mentoring experiences that I had it wasn't that I became one or I followed the lead of any one of them, but I took components of each of their approaches, the ones that most fit with what I was comfortable with, and melded them into my own approach. And I'm glad I had exposure to each.

Andy Luttrell:

What were some of the main distinctions between Insko and Schacter and how they approached questions?

Robert Cialdini:

Well, Insko was famous for building experimental mechanisms in which we would trap a phenomenon. If it existed, we built a structure for it that would register it. We arranged things so that we captured the effect, essentially. We trapped effects with the experimental studies, procedures that we built for it. He was brilliant at that.

Now, I'll mention Thibaut, who had a different approach completely. If you went into a meeting, a research meeting with him, let's say the question was how do people bargain with one another when they are the only recipient of the outcomes of that exchange versus when they represent a constituency, right? Do they bargain similarly when they have a group that they're responsible for or is it the same? Well, he would say, "What have the great novelists of our time said about that particular difference, when you are responsible only for yourself versus when you are representing some affiliated group? What do we know about that?" And then we would talk about what the great novelists may have shed light on with their intellects on this problem.

And then he would say, "Well, what have the philosophers said now? What do they say about that difference and how it resonates with our moral beings?" And so, we would go from Henry James to William James, right? And then he would say, "What have our sister disciplines said about this? What do the sociologists say? What do the political scientists say? What do the communication experts? What do the economists say about this?" And so, we were always tightening the circle from way out here with fiction, to philosophy, to social science in general, and then he would say, "What have our fellow social psychologists said about this in the literature? What are the studies or the theories that social psychologists have reported on this?"

And it occurred to me where he finished was where we would start with every other research mentor. So, Insko would trap effects. Thibaut would surround them and move closer and closer in concentric circles to something in the center that was informed by what we had learned outside first. He was a renaissance man and it showed.

And then Schacter, he chased findings wherever they went. I've never seen anybody who was more effect-driven as opposed to theory-driven or prediction-driven as Schacter. When I first went to work with him, I had a meeting with him in his office, and I had read a book he had written on

the psychology of affiliation, the tendency of people to want to be with one another, and connect with one another, and bond with one another, and be friends with one another. It's who we are as a species. We're affiliative by nature. And he had written this book, it was a classic at the time, but it was written back in the '50s, and I read the preface and he said, "This investigation began as a study of isolation. How do people isolate themselves?" Recluses and so on. People who journalists interview. Desert Sandy, out in the desert, who hasn't had any friendships or partnerships. He's just out there. Occasionally, he comes in and buys some food, but otherwise he's an isolate, right?

And I said, "How did you go from beginning to study isolation and wind up studying its opposite?" He said, "Isolation is not where the power is. That's not who we are. That's not what we do. Affiliation is." And I was so impressed by this. The guy was able and willing to get off the horse he was riding and get on another horse going in the other, in the opposite direction, in the middle of the stream. And I thought, "Okay, this is worthy of recognizing as another valuable approach to locating the truth." Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

So, you come off of all three of these different perspectives and it seems that your early work, like earliest work, was very attitudinal and looking at those sorts of processes. And then eventually, this compliance stuff creeps in, so I'm curious sort of where, speaking of... I wouldn't call this changing course and swimming upstream in the way that you just described, but it is a bit of a pivot. So, where did that interest in compliance and eventually the kinds of stuff that filled this book come from?

Robert Cialdini:

Well, what finally surfaced in terms of my ability to take control of what I wanted to study, because you find that as you go through school, you're given more and more degrees of freedom to decide what is worth studying, what interests you, what lights your fire, right? And by the time I was a postdoc with Schacter, and Jonathan Freedman, who had done the foot in the door technique, and compliance without authority kinds of research, he was there too, and he was talking about his research and so on. And I remembered how much I had always been intrigued by a personal experience that I would have repeatedly, and that is I've always been a sucker. I've always been a pushover for the appeals of various sales operators, or fundraisers who'd come to my door, and I would stand in unwanted possession of these things and having contributed to causes I'd never heard of.

And I remember thinking to myself, "There must be something other than the merits of the case that got me to give them my money. It must have been the psychology of the way they presented those merits. Isn't that interesting? That would be a worthy topic to study." And now, at this point I'm in charge of my own, and after my first job here at Arizona State, I always thought it was gonna be the first job in a series of jobs. You know, we move up by moving on within this discipline. And I just loved it here, so by the time I was here, and the department was deciding that they were going to build a reputation with their assistant professors, not try to hire high level senior people who would come to Arizona to retire. Our sister school, the University of Arizona, which had a more powerful psychology department at the time, that's the approach they took. They hired

very famous people, Harry Harlow, these kinds of people who would come and they'd stay for two years and then they'd retire, because they came to Arizona to retire.

Now, ASU had decided they're gonna build their reputation by supporting their youngest people. Well, there I was, and I could now answer those questions I had about compliance. Not just out of self-defense, but in order to truly understand how we operate as a species when we have the opportunity to exchange resources with people, to give them some of our resources for what they're offering us in return. That sounded to me as very fundamental to something we do every day and constantly.

Andy Luttrell:

And at a certain point you thought, "Let's share the gospel more widely." And so, I was looking back at when the first edition came about, and as you're so fond of quoting, I've seen you quote this a few times, this quote... I have it written down. "You have never heard true condescension until you've heard academics pronounce the word popularizer." Which, you throw that quote out as if to say this was not an enterprise that was necessarily supported, or at least there was some feeling that that might not be the case, and that quote's from 2008, and this book came out first in 1984.

Robert Cialdini:

I had real trepidation about that. And I'm proud of one thing and ashamed of another with that, and that is I began to write the book and to do the research for the book before I had tenure, which was risky in those days. Because of that idea, because this was going to be a popular book. It was not gonna be written for my colleagues alone. It was going to be written for the people who paid for the research that I was going to be writing about, who deserve to know what we had found out about them with their money. I worried about that, but I thought, "You know, by the time I started to do this, I didn't have tenure, but I knew I was gonna get tenure." Just because I had a research record that characteristically would have passed muster at my school.

But here's what I'm kind of disappointed in myself for. I waited at least two to three years before deciding to do that. I could have begun that enterprise and that exploration earlier and contributed to the larger, non-academic community, as well as the academic community earlier than I did.

Andy Luttrell:

So, was it the case that you wrote the whole thing and then shopped it around? Part of my question is at the time, my sense is this was unusual for an academic social scientist to write a book for the public. So, what was the landscape like? How did you figure out how to actually do this thing?

Robert Cialdini:

So, what happened was at the time I was the head of the colloquium committee at the psych department at Arizona State and we invited William McGuire, one of my heroes, maybe my only academic hero. I mean, I have other heroes in my life, but he may have been my only academic hero. He was a brilliant guy. Anyway, he was giving a talk. He was discussing where to get ideas that are worth testing, right? And he said, "Follow the practitioner's rule of thumb. They know what works. They may not know why it works because it's not their job." Finding out why it works, that's our job, right? So, go out and see what the practitioners are doing to get compliance,

to get other people to say yes to them, and to give them resources, money, or whatever, votes, whatever it would be. Then, take that to the laboratory, figure out what is going on there.

And so, I decided there was only one way I could get access to practitioners' rules of thumb from the inside and that is to join their training programs. I enrolled in the training programs of as many influence professions as I could get access to. So, I learned how to sell automobiles, I learned how to sell insurance, portrait photography, nutrition systems and so on. I did the same thing with fundraisers. What do they do to get us to say yes? With public relations people, recruiters, and so on. And in the process, that was to see what worked, what they said really worked for them. But in the process, I saw that there were hundreds of tactics and practices they used, but the majority of them could be classified in terms of just six universal principles of influence. The influence process had a very small footprint. Just these six things that everybody used.

And in the process, it occurred to me, "Oh, I'm not the only one who would be interested in knowing what these six principles are and how they work. People in general would be." So, that first version of the book was heavily oriented toward consumers. How to recognize and resist these approaches when they're used on us in undue or unwelcome ways. And that was the beginning of the book. What was interesting is that no consumer group ever called me afterwards.

Andy Luttrell:

Did you ever try your hand on it? So, you attended the trainings, but did you ever walk onto the floor of a car lot and try to sell a car?

Robert Cialdini:

No, because I didn't think that was ethical for me to take any money from anybody based on what I did in this study, in this participant observation form of research. But I would accompany old pros who would go along and then they would do some things, and then I would ask them, "Well, why did you do that?" And then I would get some information from them about what they did and why they thought it was valuable to do this based on their trial-and-error experience. And all of that was at first designed to test those possible explanations in a social psychological way, experimentation, and laboratories, and so on.

But it quickly ballooned out of proportion to just that narrow purpose.

Andy Luttrell:

I wondered... My dad has been in sales his whole adult life and I was just talking to him the other day and he was saying he thought he could sell cars. He said, "Oh, this sounds great. I love cars. I love sales." He lasted one day as a car salesman. He said, "I quit at the end of the day. It was awful. I hated it." And for some reason I had this... Maybe this rumor that you had actually done the door-to-door selling, but it sounds like not.

Robert Cialdini:

Only by tagging along.

Andy Luttrell:

By tagging along.

Robert Cialdini:

With people. Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

Have you since attended new trainings? Presumably, many of them are now built on your book. But I'm curious, are there trends, if you've revisited that experience, that you might notice look any different now than it did back then?

Robert Cialdini:

What I've seen is the use of these principles online now. They've migrated to platforms, social media, electronic marketing, eCommerce of one sort or another, and that's where I've seen the people who do this for a living offering courses and trainings on how one goes about it and how to harness these human tendencies to get assent and compliance, in this case it's clicking that button, through the use of these principles online.

Andy Luttrell:

So, the original book, and I hate to do this to you, 1984, which was nearly 40 years ago, and plenty has changed in the field of psychology, and yet these principles seem pretty well established. The notions of reciprocity and social validation we don't need to rehash, because if people haven't heard about those yet, they definitely need to read the book. But after all this time, there's a new principle of influence called unity, and in my own teaching and work in this world, I've sort of thought about those studies that you talk about in the unity section as being similarity, right? It sort of seemed like it fit into the framework you already had. And going back to your work in basking in reflected glory, you had done some of the foundational work on ingroup bias and those sorts of things.

So, in some ways I think, "Oh. Well, that's always been part of the framework." And in some ways, I go, "How did it take so long for Cialdini to put this idea into the book?" So, what was the spark that led to the development of a new principle?

Robert Cialdini:

Well, first of all, I see it as distinct from similarity. So, for example, similarity is one of the factors that increases liking. If we tell people we like the same kind of ethnic food, we like the same movies, we have the same sense of humor, same fashion styles and so on, we like the... I mean, I will like you more. But that's not what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about commonalities of membership in groups that define my identity. Tribes, essentially.

And what I've seen, to answer your question, is increasing evidence of tribalism all around us, especially in the political sphere. But you see it in all kinds of instances. Regionalism and so on. And you see it in the literature of our discipline, where identity, personal identity is a very powerful factor in determining whether people say yes to a request or not. So, if I say to my group members, "You know, Andy's like us," you will now get some influence benefits from that. You'll be able to influence us considerably more than before. But if I say, "Andy is one of us," all the barriers come down. You're much more likely to be successful. We just say yes to those who are of us.

So, there's a lovely little study that was done back in the... I guess the early nineties on a college campus. Researchers had a young woman stand on campus with a canister for a legitimate charity. Let's say it's the United Way, right? And asked people, "Could you give a contribution to this charity?" And she got some donations. But if she preceded that request with one sentence, "I'm a student here too," donations more than doubled. People just favor those who share an identity with them. And I put in the new version of the book a personal example of this. I grew up in Wisconsin where the NFL hometown team has always been the Green Bay Packers, so I'm a Green Bay Packers fan. And I read a newspaper article a while ago that said that Justin Timberlake and Lil Wayne are both avid Packers fans. And Andy, I immediately thought better of their music.

Andy Luttrell:

That strikes such a chord. I tell a very similar story when I teach ingroup/outgroup. There's an actress who was on the TV show *House*, and it turns out that she went to my high school, was from my hometown. I have no special... I've never met this person. I don't know really her at all, but I'll tell you, I told everyone I could find that I went to the same high school as the person on the TV, just because there's this shared bond. As though somehow, I'm responsible for her success.

Robert Cialdini:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

So, I'm a little curious then, so I buy that this is different than similarity, right? That there is something different. But what is it psychologically about unity that makes it operate differently? So, in some ways, you could say ingroup bias has always been this thing where people favorite members of their own groups, right? Affiliated and like members of their own groups, and so I almost would think that you could say that the unity thing operates via liking. So, if it doesn't, what is it about unity that makes it pack this extra punch?

Robert Cialdini:

It's about me to a much greater extent than similarity is. There is a shared sense of wholeness, emerging of identities, so that by helping that person, we are helping ourselves in a meaningful way. By favoring that person, we are supporting ourselves. So, I would say that self-interest makes it more powerful and what you find when you give people evidence of shared identity, they see their identities as more overlapping. They meld with that other individual's identity. And as a consequence, I think that really separates unity from similarity.

Andy Luttrell:

It strikes me that it creates an obligation more than similarity does, right? So, I have to help you. To help you is to help my group. In some ways, maybe sort of a mild reciprocity thing. If you think of altruism, and kinship, and reciprocity, all that stuff gets wrapped up in this sort of... Well, you know this plenty well, that to help someone else is to really ultimately be helping myself. And that may be why this unity thing works.

Robert Cialdini:

And I think this is... You've made a good point that there's a loyalty component that I'm obligated to do it. There's actually a moral responsibility. It is ethically better to help somebody inside your

group cover up a lie than to reveal the truth. There's research on this. Somebody inside your political party, you are more willing to cover up evidence that this person has cheated on his or her taxes or has violated campaign laws and so on, because it's morally more acceptable to help one of your own than to tell the truth. That's truly distressing to me.

Andy Luttrell:

I want to talk a little bit about just writing for the public, so in some sense this is a podcast that is about communicating social science to the public, and using this as a platform to do that, and I was asking about the landscape when you first put out the book to see if we could contrast it with the state of the world right now. My impression is that this enterprise has exploded, right? You see... I see social psychology professors publishing books constantly. When did you notice that start to change and is it being done well or is there still room for us to sort of do this work more effectively?

Robert Cialdini:

You know, I'm probably biased in this, but I think the book influence in 1984 was an exemplar for people that you can do this, you should do it. Those people outside of the academic community deserve to know this information that we've uncovered. But also, you don't have to risk being diminished by it. All those fears that I had, I had some real trepidations about the extent that I would be beaten about the head and shoulders, figuratively, by my most militant colleagues who thought, "No, no, no. Don't go outside of the bounds of our rigorous discipline and try to tell your tales that have to be embellished with stories, and anecdotes, and so on. No, no. Don't do that. That's betraying our charter."

I never got that. I never got that pushback. And so, I think it sort of gave people license to do that too. And so, I see there's a whole new genre now, popular behavioral science, that didn't exist, and I'm delighted that it is full. It is brimming with really impressive treatments of what we do in ways that non-academics can understand and benefit from.

Andy Luttrell:

The book, and particularly the new one, is such a nice balance between the communicating to anyone who's never heard about this field before and to someone... I mean, I've enjoyed reading it and I have to compliment you on the notes at the end. It's like there's a whole nother book at the end of this book that just really doesn't shy away from all the evidence that we have available for these things.

Robert Cialdini:

You know, there's a funny story about those notes, and then the citations. There's hundreds of academic articles and research narratives that I can provide there. And I was at a conference a while ago and there was a woman, she was a marketer, an online marketer, and she said, "You know, why do you have all those notes and all that certification of the results? We believe you. We believe you. You don't have to do this." And I tried to explain, no, that's not just for you, that's for anybody who wanted to follow up on this. In my field, it's important and I can tell I wasn't being convincing to her that this was worth all those pages, right?

And then I said, because I recognized who she was, and I said, "And besides, it's my brand." And then she said, "Oh, right. It's your brand." Okay, then it fit for her. Then she could wave it away.

“Yeah, of course that makes sense. You’re presenting yourself in a particular way that fits with who you are or are promoting yourself as being. Okay, then it fits. Actually, it’s not that. I really do feel an obligation to the academic community and to any other community that’s interested in tracing back my conclusions to the sources.

Andy Luttrell:

And it’s a nice way to present it where all that stuff doesn’t need to be in the main text, right? If you’re reading this just to get the practical takeaways, you don’t need the 17 sources for the one claim that you made. But it’s nice to know that there are bases for those claims and there’s nuance still to explore in the endnotes that you may not get from just reading the main text.

Robert Cialdini:

That’s right. There’s more color to put into the endnotes. You can talk about other findings within the same study that you highlighted, or you can talk about other researchers who have confirmed or failed to confirm even what the initial study showed. You can do that in endnotes. They’re not in the text. People can go to them if they want to. And I think that’s a good middle ground.

Andy Luttrell:

And the number of those references that are within the last few years, I have to commend you. There’s a lot of updated work that’s gone into here, as well, which those endnotes are great, because you go, “Well, the main point hasn’t really changed, but it’s nice to know there’s still work supporting these ideas and adding that color.”

Robert Cialdini:

Right. And if you wanted to follow up on it, you can go to those most recent studies and get a literature review that situates you now in that tradition.

Andy Luttrell:

So, for social scientists who might be hoping to communicate their work or their field’s work to the public, and this is maybe somewhat of a selfish question because I count myself among them, what advice do you have for responsibly but understandably communicating social science research? So, there are a million ways to do it, but when you sit down to write a new chapter or write a new book, what goes through your head as you think about how do I take the data and make it into something that people can understand and is also true to what has been shown?

Robert Cialdini:

Okay, so I’ll step back a little bit from that question to say I could never write fiction. I need data. I have to start with the data and then I can build around it. That doesn’t mean the dataset has to go first in my presentation. I can tell a story that is aligned with the conclusions that come out of that data, or even the procedures of that study ahead of time, to build interest in it, or familiarity with it, or resonance with it, but the data have to be at the center of everything and then there are stories, and anecdotes, and personal examples that you can bring in, and humorous quotes and so on that build around this.

But if I were to answer directly your question, when I’m about to write a new chapter or a new section of a chapter, what do I look for to begin with? And it’s a puzzle. It’s some feature of human

behavior that doesn't seem to make sense that you can explain as you move through the material as the reason you can now understand that mystery that you began with. That is something that I try to do as often as possible and here's another little secret: almost no one has recognized it because mysteries pull you in. They grab you by the collar and they pull you into them so that you're not thinking about literary devices like puzzles, and what you start something with. No. You're curious about this material, right? How you answer this. And if you can convince people that they will understand it by the time they get through this material if they focus on it, you've got people who are reading your stuff like somebody reading a detective novel, where you know that to solve the crime you have to know all of the features of the situation, all of the details.

Now you got people paying attention to the necessary details of truly understanding a phenomenon for reasons that are internal to them. They need to know how this ends. So, I've found that as a very productive way to start. I can't always do it. It's not always possible to do it. But whenever I start some section, I want to try to think of a mystery or an unusual form of human behavior that this conclusion resolves that I'm gonna come to later on. Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

That is great. Well, I don't want to take too much more of your time, and this has been a real treat. I wanted to say in the beginning, I think *Influence* was probably one of the first things that I read that put the idea in my head that social psychology was a thing that answers interesting questions, and here I am all those years later doing that same kind of work, so just thank you for that kind of work, and also for taking the time to talk about... We've covered a lot of ground. All the stuff that we talked about today. It was a real pleasure.

Robert Cialdini:

I enjoyed it, Andy, I have to say.

Andy Luttrell:

Alright, that'll do it for another episode of *Opinion Science*! Big thanks to Robert Cialdini for taking the time to talk. I've been excited about this one for a while, and I'm happy it all worked out. His new book *Influence: Revised and Expanded* is available now. Check out InfluenceAtWork.com for more information about the new book, his other books, trainings his team does, and more.

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Check out the show notes for a link to a full transcript of this week's show, links to the topics we covered, and a link to my online audio course, *The Science of Persuasion*.

Ok, that's all for now. If you enjoy the show, please leave a nice review online. And I'll see you in a couple weeks for more *Opinion Science*. Buh bye...